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## INCIDENT WITHIN AN INCIDENT

### Human Resource Specialist Role in Critical Incident Stress Management December 2008

An incident within an incident takes on an urgency all its own. Activity levels get a jump-start, what may have been a routine fire assignment now becomes a race for action and professional and emotional attention. Communications increase, physical activity increases, emotions may go on overload or to autopilot, teams pull together or may tear apart; new faces appear in fire camp-including the media. Crew needs become paramount, Incident Management Teams become stretched and the Human Resource Specialist (HRSP) is at the eye of the storm. Sound dramatic? It is and yet it is reality.

The HRSP has a vital role in assisting others. You need to recognize your own 'humanness' and vulnerability – know when to say 'not right now-maybe in an hour...' - keep yourself healthy. Following is a practical list of considerations that will help you in your role as an HRSP during a Critical Incident.

#### **PRIOR TO THE CRITICAL INCIDENT - CONTACT GEOGRAPHIC AREA HRSP COORDINATOR FOR ASSISTANCE WITH THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION**

- Local Agency contacts - names and phone numbers
- List of available meeting areas in community
- Geographic Area Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) Resources and Procedures

#### **OBTAIN THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:**

- Your copy of the Shift plan should be current and accurate
- Know how to find the location of sleeping areas for crews
- Contact names and phone numbers for crew boss/crew rep/ IARR/company contacts
- Locations for air ops, fire camp, communications/dispatch etc...

#### **AFTER NOTIFICATION THAT A CRITICAL INCIDENT HAS OCCURRED**

- Get all the information you can - time, place, circumstances
- Determine the extent of impact - who will need to respond, who has responded, who was on site, who heard radio traffic, who was dispatching, was air ops involved etc...
- Order another HRSP - on a larger incident, request a special Forest Liaison to work directly with the CISM resource
- Track location, work shifts of impacted crews/individuals
- Where are these crews staying - who are the crew boss'/reps/company contacts
- Consider the cultural needs of crews
- What impacts will there be on the Incident Management Team (IMT) and camp personnel?
- Make sure more phones are available so personnel can call home.

As the crews/individuals begin coming back from fire duty, do mini-defusing. Provide a private location and ensure immediate needs are met. Establish whether a full debriefing needs to take place. Be sure to inform/confer with Incident Commander in all considerations.

If a Critical Incident Debriefing is needed, assist the IMT to prepare a resource order to order a CISM team. Plan to have CISM resources in place 24 to 72 hours after the critical incident. If Fire CISM Peer Teams are not available, local teams from fire stations, hospitals, and mental health agencies may be available. Give your name and phone number as the contact/IMT liaison for the CISM resources. Be sure to be accessible to take all calls and answer questions.

## ONCE A CISM TEAM HAS BEEN ORDERED

- Establish a meeting place and time to meet with CISM team
- Coordinate local transportation and lodging for CISM team if necessary
- Coordinate with other members of the IMT to assure impacted crews/individuals have communication regarding CISM team availability on site. Communicate that a team will be available for informal contacts at specified times and places
- Ensure that **ALL** affected Fire Personnel are provided with CISM opportunity
- Provide CISM team with the most up to date information upon their arrival including impacted personnel, crew/individual locations, shifts, and availability. Have they been asked to stand down for a shift? Are they contract or agency?
- Provide team with meeting place options to hold debriefings
- Provide an interpreter for non-English speaking teams
- Set up vehicle transportation to other sites if necessary
- Once a debriefing schedule has been set, make sure all crews know where/when the debriefing will take place. Work closely with Command and General Staff
- If working with Native American Crews or on Tribal lands, make sure all cultural concerns are met and addressed.
- Keep checking on your IMT. What are the impacts to the team as the days go on?

## IN THE CASE OF LINE OF DUTY DEATH

Regardless of whether or not a person is a contractor or agency employee, all line of duty deaths must be treated with the utmost care and concern both in terms of impacts to crews or impacts to coworkers. These people have been in the same chow line, used the same showers, and worked side by side with other crews, whether on this incident or one prior to this. Understand that fire is a community, regardless of who is involved. Communication is VERY important for all survivors. They may want to know how to send condolences to families, how that person will be 'honored' both at fire camp and back home. Remember that these incidents may bring back other memories for seasoned fire fighters- emotions run high. Be compassionate to everyone.

## AFTER THE TEAM LEAVES

Be available - be visible - check-in. The CISM team may give you names of certain individuals who may need extra care - demobing, change of crew location, and time off recommendations. Follow through if possible to make sure the resource orders have been cut for transportation etc...

The HRSP is the 'melting pot' for issues. You may be called upon to just sit and listen or you may be requested to help coordinate a special memorial service at Fire Camp. Whatever it is, give yourself the time and grace to meet your own needs. Recognize your own 'humanness' and vulnerability - know when to say 'not right now - maybe in an hour...' You have a vital role in assisting others - keep yourself healthy.